

HISTORIC PRESERVATION REVIEW BOARD STAFF REPORT AND RECOMMENDATION

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| Property Address: | 3415 Lowell Street, NW | X | Agenda |
| Landmark/District: | Cleveland Park Historic District | | Consent Calendar |
| Meeting Date: | May 26, 2011 | X | Concept Review |
| H.P.A. Number: | 11-278 | X | Alteration |
| Staff Reviewer: | Anne Brockett | | New Construction |

On behalf of owners Casey and Richard Aboulafia, architect David Vogt of Case Design seeks the Board's concept review for a 2-story rear addition and removal of the existing garage at this Cleveland Park home. The house was designed by Davis Palmer in 1920 and built, along with 3417 Newark next door, by Charles Taylor as speculative housing.

Project Description

The rear addition is proposed to be 26' in width by 24'6" in depth and would replace the existing shallow rear ell, possibly an enclosed porch. The addition would be set in considerably on the west side to meet the 8' side yard setback requirement, and would project on the east side beyond the side wall of the house in order to meet the owners' desire for space. The addition is notched at the northeast corner for a rear deck.

On the east side, a slight indentation of about a foot is planned where the addition joins the rear wall. This inset, along with the proposed hardiplank siding and reduced eave depth will help distinguish the addition from the original construction. Windows are proposed to be 6/1 to match the existing (although they are shown as 1/1 on the elevations).

The owners also propose to demolish the existing 2-car garage on the property. The garage appears on the 1927 Sanborn map in the same configuration as it does on the 1960 Sanborn and is presumed to be the same garage today. Removing the garage is not necessary for zoning purposes.

Evaluation

Although the addition will be visible from the east over the double lot of the abutting neighbor, the architect has amended the plans to set the addition back from the original design. Initially proposed to project beyond the front porch depth, the addition would now project only slightly further than the existing bay, but not further than the front porch. In addition, the siding has been changed from a panelized system to a more compatible horizontal siding and the deck stairs have been set in so as not to project beyond the side wall. On this elevation, the design could benefit from an alteration in design to reduce the roof overhang of the first floor to make the roof here and over the entrance the same height and more historically appropriate. In addition, the door opening on to deck differs in plan and elevation and needs clarification as the permit drawings develop.

The design of the west elevation is unarticulated. Because it is set back from the existing side wall and the adjacent house is in very close proximity, it will not be visible from the street. However, the HPO would suggest a horizontal string course to break up the elevation and divide the first and second floors.

The HPO supports the addition with its projection on the east side given the 1-foot deep notch separating new from old, the distance of the projection from the street, and the diminished visibility due to the presence of the front porch. It is deferential to the main house in scale and utilizes windows, siding materials, and ornamental details that complement the original construction. In its form, scale, and materials, the addition is compatible with the subject house and the character of the Cleveland Park Historic District.

However, the HPO does not support demolition of the garage. While the initial survey of Cleveland Park did not document garage buildings or classify them as contributing or non-contributing to the historic district, the Board has had to consider this question on multiple occasions over the years when garages are proposed for demolition or fundamental alteration. In each instance, the Board has considered the individual property and its importance, the date and character of the garage, its visibility from public vantage points in the historic district, and condition.

Based on its form, materials, location, overall appearance, consistency of character with the house, date of construction (based on map research), and integrity of form and condition, the HPO recommends that the garage at 3415 Lowell Street be considered a contributing structure to the historic district. It is believed that the garage was built concurrently with the house as its materials correspond, which was typical of garage construction of the period. It was built in c. 1920 as a compliment to the house and as part of a movement to entice the rapidly growing number of automobile owning Washingtonians to consider purchasing a home in Cleveland Park. Garages such as these are important in understanding the life-changing advent of the automobile and the accompanying changes in development patterns in early suburbs. As per the District's Automobile-Related Resources Historic Context Statement:

“As quickly as the car became ubiquitous, so did the need for parking facilities as driveways did not yet exist and parking on the street overnight was prohibited. In addition, the fragile early model automobiles needed constant mechanical attention and were better maintained when not exposed to the elements. When not being used, most owners initially stored their automobiles off-site in managed garages, only later constructing their own private garages. These early garages were multi-purpose, providing storage, maintenance facilities, and often dealing in parts and supplies.”

These public garages provided car parking and storage “in much the way a livery provided carriage storage and stabling for horses in the previous decades.” However, in Cleveland Park, which had been developed as a streetcar suburb in the late 1890s, there were no public parking facilities nearby. Owners of the older houses eventually added garages and houses built in the 1910s and 1920s began to be built with them, showing the developers' and neighborhood's adaptation to this new technology.

Trade magazines and home and decorating publications began promote private garages for “ease, security, and economy. In addition to being closer – on the car owner's property – private garages were safer and could keep temperature-sensitive automobiles in a climate controlled setting.” This garage is a well-preserved example of this early type of detached, privately owned garage. Much more decorative than brick-box alley garages being built in the denser urban parts of the city, Cleveland Park developers began to include these individually designed and constructed garages for the wealthier car-owning clientele they wished to attract.

Because of its ability to convey a sense of the development of Cleveland Park from streetcar suburb to early automobile use; its visibility from the street and traditional location on its lot; its design, which both complements the house and contributes to the streetscape; its stable structural condition; and its potential for adaptability for current use for automobile or other storage – perhaps with a new door or doors – the HPO recommends that the Board determine the garage to contribute to the character of the historic district and deny its demolition.

Recommendation

The HPO recommends that the Board approve the addition incorporating the design comments above and delegate final approval to staff.

The HPO recommends that the Board deny the demolition of the garage.